

## Brown orders schools open by mid-April

### Local schools' plans fall in line with the governor's deadline

By JADE MCDOWELL AND BRYCE DOLE  
STAFF WRITERS

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced on Friday, March 5, that she was directing all Oregon schools to offer hybrid or full in-person instruction to all elementary students by March 29 and all sixth- through 12th-grade students by April 19.

Umatilla and Morrow County districts say the announcement doesn't change their plans, which have already brought students back to the classroom or will before the deadline set by the governor.

Brown said the science is "very,

very clear" that with proper safety measures in place, there is low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools.

"Thanks to the smart choices Oregonians have made, our COVID-19 numbers have declined," Brown said in a statement. "All but six counties now meet or exceed Oregon's advisory metrics for a return to in-person, hybrid learning for all K-12 grade levels. And, five of those counties meet the advisory metrics for a return to elementary school."

School districts may still offer comprehensive distance learning to students who wish to remain fully

online, the news release stated, and it will be an option for when "community transmission rates of COVID-19 warrant a transition, as determined by state or local public health directives." Offering at least some in-person instruction will no longer be optional for districts whose COVID-19 numbers meet state guidelines for reopening, however.

According to a letter Brown sent to the directors of the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Education, a majority of Oregon students have not

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Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File  
Sunset Elementary School teacher Natalie Trotter leads a class on the first day of in-person instruction for the Hermiston School District on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021.

### UPDATES

## Umatilla County COVID-19 numbers continue to drop

HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla County's COVID-19 numbers continue to decrease.

From Wednesday, March 3, to Tuesday, March 9, the county saw 55 new reported cases of COVID-19, down from 77 in the seven days prior to that. The county did not report any new deaths in the past week.

Morrow County saw only three new cases reported in the past seven days, and no new deaths of individuals with COVID-19.

Oregon Health Authority announces new risk levels for each county every two weeks based on the cases and test positivity rates for a county in a 14-day time period. On Tuesday, March 9, the state announced that Umatilla County would remain at high risk for another two weeks, while Morrow County will move from moderate to low starting Friday, March 12.

"We are largely seeing case rates decline across the state, with the most counties in the Lower Risk level since the framework was introduced in November," Governor Kate Brown said in a news release. "This should serve as a reminder that when we follow the health and safety measures we know work against this virus, we can truly make a difference in infection spread. But, we still have more work to do before we reach the level of community-wide protection we need in order to return to a sense of normalcy. I encourage all Oregonians to keep it up and to get your vaccine when it's available to you."

Oregon has reported a total of 158,007 known cases of COVID-19 and 2,303 deaths of individuals with COVID-19 since the pandemic began, placing it as the fourth lowest number of cases per capita and the fifth lowest deaths per capita of the 50 states, according to the CDC.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald  
Hermiston High School band teacher Sean McClanahan instructs a virtual class from his classroom at the high school on Friday, March 5, 2021.

## Music to their ears

### Hermiston music teachers keep bands and choirs going virtually

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

There is no hiding in the back of virtual choir or band class.

In pre-pandemic days, music students could blend in with a roomful of other students during rehearsals and on stage. But for students who have been taking music classes during Hermiston School District's comprehensive distance learning phase, participation often means recording a solo performance alone at home, knowing the video will be spliced together with other students' parts later.

"This way of doing choir is super intimidating," middle school choir teacher Stacy Cooley said. "For example, when you have to sing into a camera and you're all by yourself, that's really hard and you're super vulnerable."

The spliced-together method was how the middle school and high school choirs and bands performed their winter concerts. The virtual concerts, still available on the school district's YouTube channel, create the illusion of the students performing together by carefully layering the audio files together and showing each student

#### INSIDE

In this week's Editor's Desk column, news editor Jade McDowell reflects on what experiences students have lost during the pandemic and what they might have gained, **Page 4A**.

in their own little box onscreen.

#### Teaching during a pandemic

Putting together such videos is one of the many skills music teachers had to learn on the fly after the pandemic hit.

"It's several hours of work," Hermiston High School choir teacher Jordan Bemrose-Rust said. "One class video takes about 10 hours to do, and I have five choirs."

It also takes longer for teachers to prepare their students for the concert videos. Bemrose-Rust has to record herself singing students' parts for them, for example, so they have a frame of reference while practicing at home during the self-guided learning part of their day. They also need to have a recording of the instrumental accompaniment to practice along

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Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald  
Hermiston High School choir teacher Jordan Bemrose-Rust poses for a portrait in her classroom at the high school on Friday, March 5, 2021.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald  
A pair of cymbals rests atop a drum kit in the Hermiston High School band room as band teacher Sean McClanahan instructs an online band class on Friday, March 5, 2021.

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